



SEPARATIST MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS AND INSECURITY IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

Gbenemene Kpae

gbenemenekpae1970@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: *This work examined how separatist movements occasioned conflicts and their attendant security challenges in Nigeria, especially in the South East. The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the social identity theory. The study adopted qualitative research. The sources of data were secondary sources and the method of data analysis was content analysis. The study found that the factors that occasioned separatist agitations for self-determination in Nigeria and South East in particular are; poor governance, ostracism, religion, ethnicity, banditry and terrorism, political and economic marginalization etc. The study also found that agitations for self-determination by separatist movements in the South East have caused serious security challenges in the region. There have been serious clashes between security personnel and groups affiliated to Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). More than that groups such as unknown gun men and the Eastern Security Network have in numerous instances burnt down police stations and killed numerous security personnel (mostly police men) in the region. Furthermore, they have destroyed and burnt down numerous government facilities and inflicted harm on innocent citizens who fail to comply with their sit at home order. From the findings of the study, the study recommended that the root causes of the problem as highlighted in the work should be addressed. When this is done, security challenges confronting the region would be resolved.*

Key Words: Separatist Movements, conflict, Security, IPOB, Unknown Gun men.

1.1 Introduction

Separatist movements which are corollaries of the desire for self-determination are rooted in the spirit of nationalism found in a section of an internationally recognized state. By this we mean that there is a spirit of nationalism that is found among the people of a given area that leads them to clamor for secession from an existing state. The factors that account for the above state of affairs are numerous. They are; marginalization, economic strangulation, politico-bureaucratic emasculation, military neutralization and ostracism. Beyond these broad factors enumerated above, there seems to be strong historical factors namely, ethnicity and religion which could spur hatred and distrust in a plural society such as Nigeria.

Separatist movements are not peculiar to a specific part of the world, rather traces of them are found in almost

all parts. The above state of affairs is true even in our own day. In this connection, Ugorji (2017) avers that social movements have played vital roles in making structural and policy changes in countries around the world. From the abolitionist movement to the Civil Rights movement and to the current Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, or the rise and spread of the Arab Spring in the Middle East, there is something unique in all social movements: their ability to audaciously and fearlessly speak out and draw public attention to their demands for justice and equality or for structural and policy changes. Like successful or unsuccessful social movements around the world, the pro-Biafra independence movement under the umbrella of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has been successful in drawing public attention



to their demands and attracting millions of supporters and sympathizers.

As earlier noted, separatist agitations are not peculiar to a specific part of the world, it exist in many parts of the globe especially where there is perceived feeling of alienation, injustice and oppression. In recent times, for instance, we have seen separatist agitations in Canada, Spain, and Iraq. In Spain, there is the 'Catalan independence movement', in Iraq, there is the 'Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK)', and in Canada, there is 'Parti Quebecois', all clamoring for a separate state for their various regions. This situation was well captured by Goldstein and Pevehouse (2012) as they opined,

“Dozens of secession movements exist around the world, of varying sizes and political effectiveness, but they succeed in seceding only rarely. The existing state always tries to hold onto the area in question. For example, in the 1990, the predominantly Albanian population of the Serbian province of Kosovo fought a war to secede from Kosovo” (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2012, p.179).

In Canada, the French speaking Quebec has been agitating for its own independent state. “Many French Canadians have felt that their distinctive culture has been eroded by predominantly English culture. There has also been a feeling of economic and other forms of discrimination. The resulting nationalist sentiment spawned the separatist 'Parti Quebecois' and led to a series of efforts in the 1980's and 1990's to obtain autonomy, even independence, for the province. The most recent of these was a 1995 referendum on separation” (Rourke, 2008, p.109).

This work looks at how separatist movements have occasioned conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria. In the south east IPOB secessionist movement has occasioned the problem of unknown gunmen, with military forces occupying the region, especially in Imo State. In the south West, there are calls for an Independent Yoruba Nation, which often gives rise to

skirmishes, especially with Fulani herdsmen and now with Nigerian security forces. In this connection, Adibe, (2017) maintains that there is separatist agitation in virtually every area in the country, underlying the fact that the foundation for Nigeria's nationhood remains on shaky ground. Among the Yoruba, for instance, echoes of separatism come in different forms, from a direct call for Oduduwa republic to those championing a sovereign national conference to decide if the federating units of the country still want to continue to live together, and, if so, under what arrangements.

1.2 Objectives Of The Study

- 1) Examine the causes of separatist movements in Nigeria
- 2) Analyse the degree to which separatist movements occasion conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review

The literature reviewed shall be sub-divided into conceptual review and theoretical framework.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Social Identity Theory. It was formulated by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s and the 1980s. Social Identity Theory begins with the assumption that individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups and that such identifications work to protect and bolster self-identity. The creation of group identities involves both the categorization of one's "in-group" with regard to an "out-group" and the tendency to view one's own group with a positive bias vis-à-vis the out-group. The result is an identification with a collective, depersonalized identity based on group membership and imbued with positive aspects (Oakes, 1987).

A portion of one's self-concept is dependent on the importance and relevance placed on the group membership(s) to which an individual belongs (Turner and Oakes, 1986). Individuals' drive for positive



identity and esteem influences the social comparisons they make (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

The social identity theory is relevant to this study because it shows in clear fashion how primordial ethnic loyalties influence the political identity of Ibo's. This explains their support for IPOB calls for secession.

2.2 Theoretical Clarification

Origin/History of Separatists Movement in South East Nigeria

Due to multi ethnic nature of Nigeria, and the series of events that followed the January coup-de 'tat and July 1966 counter-coup led by some northern soldiers, and the massacre of Igbos in northern Nigeria, the state of Biafra was declared in 1967. This massacre cumulated into the Nigerian civil war which ended in 1970. Although, after the war Gowon declared 'no victor no vanquished', but the casualties suffered by the Igbos as a result of the three year war and the failure of the federal government to truly integrate the south east into the mainstream of the Nigerian political structure still creates this feeling of injustice and alienation against the Igbo ethnic nationality. Consequently, in 1999 the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) was formed. It was the first contemporary group to push for independence of the south east. Onyewuchi (2015) contends that for over a decade, agitation for Biafra's restoration was championed by MASSOB, led by Ralph Uwazuruike. The group pledged to be non-violent but, over time, its members, alleging provocation, clashed with police repeatedly, resulting in several members being killed. On 6 December, Uwazuruike announced that MASSOB had been renamed the Biafra Independence Movement ('BIM'). Onyewuchi (2015) further reveals that in September 2010, a MASSOB splinter group formed the Biafra Zionist Movement ('BZM'), later renamed the Biafran Zionist Front ('BZF'). Led by Benjamin Igwe Onwuka, BZF 're-declared the Republic of Biafra' at a rally in Enugu on 5 November 2012.

The Indigenous People of Biafra IPOB was created as yet another MASSOB splinter group when Nnamdi Kanu, 'the figure at the centre of the current unrest, fell out with Uwazuruike in 2009 and emerged as the leader of IPOB in 2012'. Shortly thereafter, Kanu established Radio Biafra, which is directed from London and officially banned in Nigeria. Since its inception, IPOB has been the vanguard of the current Biafra independence movement. IPOB and MASSOB have consistently claimed they are unrelated: 'According to IPOB members, violent actions blamed on MASSOB smear pro-Biafrans' reputation and are used by the government to claim the whole movement is violent (Onyewuchi, 2015).

The IPOB declaration document titled Expiration of Nigeria's 'Amalgamation Proclamation and Restoration of the Sovereign State of Biafra' addressed to the 'United Nations Committee on Human Rights' and 'Heads of State of All Countries' states the following;

"In 1914, the British Government under the recommendation of Frederick Lugard amalgamated the southern and northern regions of areas bordering with Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Benin republic, and proclaimed the amalgamated geospace as a country with the name Nigeria. This amalgamation was executed without the consent of the indigenous people that constitute these regions. According to the proclamation documents, the amalgamation was conditioned to have a lifespan of 100 years (expiring on December 31, 2013) after which any of the amalgamating regions or peoples would have the right to opt out. For the past 100 years, the



indigenous people of Biafra who are part of the constituents of Nigeria have suffered untold hardship, threats to their culture, tradition and their way of life combined with political and economic emasculation, and annihilation of her citizens by the Hausa/Fulani- Yoruba dominated Nigerian government.

The Causes of Separatist Movements in Nigeria

Banditry, killings and kidnapping: the activities of bandits which means involves killings and kidnapping in the country have caused a general sense of unease in the country. This insecurity caused by bandits from the North has contributed to the demand for separation.

Ostracism: Prominent northern youth groups gave the Igbos an ultimatum to leave the northern region before October 2017. The order was contained in a statement issued after a meeting in Kaduna state. They asked the Igbo residing in the region to “start making plans to leave.” Their order was premised on the shut-down of major towns in south-eastern part of the country on May 30, by members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its sponsors. The northern youths organisations, which had their leaders in attendance, include Arewa citizens action for change, Arewa youth consultative forum, Arewa youth development foundation, Arewa students forum and Northern emancipation network on the Igbo persistence for recession among others. (Asadu, 2017)

Abdulazeez Suleiman, one of the leaders, who read the statement on behalf of others said the region was “tired of the marriage”, hence the need for restructuring. He also said the region was calling for steps to facilitate the final dissolution of this “hopeless union” that has never been convenient to any of the parties. “The persistence for the actualisation of Biafra by the unruly

Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria has lately assumed another alarming twist which involved the forceful lockdown of activities and denial of other people’s right to free movement in the south-east by the rebel Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its overt and covert sponsors,” the statement read (Asadu, 2017).

Poor governance: political leadership in Nigeria is nothing to write home about. Instead of governing with the interest of the people at heart, they rule in in order to promote their self-interest. Primitive accumulation of wealth by the political class in Nigeria keeps the majority in poverty. Corruption among the political class and institutions of governance have hindered economic growth and development. This is because no serious attempt is made to create the enabling environment for investment and prosperity in the country.

Religion and ethnicity: religion and ethnicity are twin pillars of disunity in Nigeria. The intolerance and arrogance between the two major religions, namely, Christianity and Islam in the country have driven a wedge among the citizens. Islam is the major religion in the North, while Christianity mostly dominates the South. On serious issues such as leadership selection

Separatist movements as threats to security in Nigeria

The spate of insecurity that has occasioned secessionist efforts is quite legion. In the South East there is an ever-increasing security threat owing to IPOB struggle for Independence. The current killings by the so-called unknown gun men is a symptom of IPOB struggle, even though they have disassociated themselves from the activities of the unknown gun men. The decedent elements have in recent times targeted security operatives and government installations. There have been frequent attacks on police stations and checkpoints which have resulted to the death of so many security operatives.



Table 2.1: Selected cases of attacks on police stations and security personnel in the South East

| Date | Incidences and casualties |
|----------------------|--|
| January, 8, 2021 | Three policemen were attacked at Onueke Police Station in Ezza South Local Government Area (LGA) in Ebonyi State on January 8. |
| January 23, 2021 | On January 23, two policemen were killed after gunmen invaded a police station in Aba, Abia State. |
| February 1, 2021 | On February 1, hoodlums, numbering about 20, razed the divisional police station at Omoba, headquarters of Isiala Ngwa South in Abia, killing a policeman and looting the armoury. |
| February 4, 2021 | A police station was burnt at Isu, Onicha LGA in Ebonyi on February 4. |
| February 5, 2021 | On February 5, two policemen were killed at the Umulowo police division in Obowo LGA in Imo State |
| February 23 – | Two police officers reportedly lost their lives when some unknown gunmen attacked a police station in Aba, Abia State. |
| February 24 – | Hoodlums killed a police officer and razed down a patrol vehicle in Ekwulobia in Anambra State. |
| February 25 – | Four police officers were killed at MCC in Calabar, Cross River state by gunmen. |
| | On March 1, a police station was attacked at Iboko divisional police station in Izzi, Ebonyi. |
| March 9, 2021 | A police station was burnt at Ihitte-Uboma LGA in Abia on March 9. |
| March 18, 2021 | On March 18, an unknown number of policemen were killed in Ekwulobia, when gunmen attacked various locations. |
| March 22, 2021 | Three police officers attached to the Abiriba police division were killed in Ohafia LGA in Abia on March 22. Their rifles were taken away. |
| March 31, 2021 | On March 31, three policemen attached to the former Central Bank of Nigeria governor, Prof Charles Soludo, were killed in Isuofia, Anambra. |

Sources: Jibueze and Anioke, 2021; Yusuf, 2021

Figure2. 1: Unknown gun men attack Njaba police station in Imo State



Source: Peter, 2021

The figure above shows how gunmen bombed the Njaba police station, in Imo State, destroying a part of the building and cars. They also beheaded two police men (Peter, 2021).

Figure 2.3: Unknown gunmen burn down police station in Imo, kill officer.



Isaac, 2021



The figure above shows attack on a police station by unknown gunmen at Arondizuogu in Ideato Local Government Area of Imo State. An officer was killed while the station was burnt down in the attack. The attack was an offshoot of a clash between angry youths in the community and soldiers after military officers had invaded the Awo-Mmama community and set

houses ablaze. In the clash between the youths and soldiers the police at least one hotel, seven shops and a vehicle were razed. The Nigerian Army blamed the incident on the Eastern Security Network (ESN), the militant wing of the proscribed Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) (Isaac, 2021).

Table 2.2: Attacks on government installations by unknown gun men in the South East

| Date | Incidences and casualties |
|---------------|--|
| May 2, 2021 | Arsonists burnt the INEC office in Essien Udim LGA in Akwa Ibom state. |
| May 9 , 2021 | Gunmen razed down INEC offices in Ohafia LGA of Abia state. |
| May 13, 2021 | The commission’s office at Udenu Local Government Area headquarters in Obollo-Afor, Enugu was completely razed down. Nothing was spared in the office after the attack, including 16 generators. |
| May 14, 2021 | A total of seven Toyota Hilux vans belonging to INEC were burnt in a night attack on the headquarters of the commission in Awka, Anambra State. |
| May 16, 2021 | The state office in Enugu suffered yet another arson and vandalism in which parts of the building were ransacked and several vehicles razed. |
| May 18, 2021 | Two more offices in Ebonyi and Ezza North local government areas of Ebonyi State were burnt down |
| May 23, 2021 | Gunmen razed headquarters of INEC in Anambra State. |
| May 23 , 2021 | The Commission’s office in Ahiazu Mbaize Local Government Area of Imo State was set ablaze. |
| May 23, 2021 | – The Commission’s office in Igboeze South Local Government Area office in Enugu State came under attack. |
| May 30, 2021 | INEC office in Njaba Council Area of Imo State was burnt by hoodlums |

Source: Saharareporters, 2021



Figure 2. 3: Gunmen Burn INEC Office In Anambra



Channels television, 2021

The figure above shows how the headquarters of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Anambra State set ablaze by gunmen. They also attempted to attack the Police 'B' Divisional Headquarters close to the INEC office but were repelled by the operatives on duty. The office of the electoral umpire and the police station are both located in Awka, the state capital, in south-east Nigeria (Channels television, 2021).

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted qualitative research. The sources of data collection in this study are secondary sources such as books, journal and internet. The method of data analysis is content analysis. The effectiveness of this method or model lies in its ability to allow the researcher to extract and interpret relevant research materials, make judgment input into the work. The method of analysis adopted in this work is content analysis. Content analysis are scholarly methodology

in research writing, by which texts are studied as to authorship, authenticity or meaning.

4.0 Conclusion

Separatist movements in Nigeria are manifestations of injustice inherent in the Nigerian polity. Feelings of marginalization, ethnic and religious differences, poor governance and corruption, banditry and terrorism etc are some of the factors that occasion separatist agitations in Nigeria, especially in the South East. What is noticeable and worrisome in recent times is the conflicts and general insecurity that have crept into the region due to the activities of Indigenous People of Biafra and their affiliates.

Recommendations

- 1) The issue of corruption and bad governance should be addressed. Any society where the people are neglected, grievances are bound to arise and such frustrations are bound to cause conflicts. IPOB separatist agitations in the



South East should be viewed from this perspective and the appropriate remedies as pointed out should be implemented.

- 2) Religious and ethnic sentiments should be reconciled with a view to Foster a feeling of togetherness in the country.
- 3) No region in the country should attempt to ostracise other regions. More often than not, this gives rise to retaliatory actions which further creates the idea of self-determination.

REFERENCES

- Yusuf, k. (2021). TIMELINE: 10 police officers killed, six stations razed in two weeks. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/449892-timeline-10-police-officers-killed-six-stations-razed-in-two-weeks.html>
- Sahara Reporters (2021). TIMELINE: 10 INEC Offices Attacked by Unknown Gunmen in May. <http://saharareporters.com/2021/06/01/timeline-10-inec-offices-attacked-unknown-gunmen-may>
- Jibueze, J, and Anioke, O. (2021). Timeline of attacks on policemen, stations in Southeast. <https://thenationonlineng.net/timeline-of-attacks-on-policemen-stations-in-southeast/>
- Onyewuchi, I. (2015). Obasi: To Tackle Biafra, Let Govt Show Fairness to All. <https://guardian.ng/interview/obasi-to-tackle-biafra-let-govt-show-fairness-to-all-2/>
- Peter, C. (2021). Breaking: Unknown Gunmen Bombs Imo Police Station, Beheads 2 Policemen. <https://dailyexcessive.com/breaking-unknown-gunmen-bombs-imo-police-station-beheads-2-policemen-video/>
- Isaac, D. (2021). Unknown gunmen burn down Police station in Imo, kill officer. <https://www.ripplesnigeria.com/unknown-gunmen-burn-down-police-station-in-imo-kill-officer/>
- Channels television, (2021). Gunmen Burn INEC Office In Anambra. <https://www.channelstv.com/2021/05/23/gunmen-burn-inec-hq-in-anambra/>